

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: MABEL LEWITT  
INTERVIEWER: GAIL CARIDDI  
DATE: JUNE 7, 1988**

**G = GAIL  
M = MABEL**

**SG-NA-T027**

Interview begins with interviewer in mid-sentence:

G: Interviewing Mabel Lewitt in conjunction with the Shifting Gears uh, The Changing Meaning of Work in Massachusetts interviewing project.

How are you doing Mabel?

M: [Both chuckle]

G: Are you all set?

M: I'm all set.

G: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your, your family background, and your, your grandparents. Could you tell us a little bit about them? Where they were from.

M: All I can tell you is my grandfather's name was Joseph Martel, from Manchester, New Hampshire and Ca, Canada. I don't know exactly where in Canada. [G: Umhm] And his wife was Irminie Allard. And uh, well she went back and forth with him too you know. [G: Uh huh] Yeah. I think they had five children.

G: Umhm. They were, they might have been from Canada you say?

M: They might have been. But one time they told me my grandfather thought, they thought he came from France, but I'm not sure on that.

G: And they lived most of the time in New Hampshire?

M: Yeah.

G: Umhm. And uh, on the, on the other side?

M: On the other side? [G: Umhm] Um, she came from Canada. [G: Umhm] And she settled, they settled in Pownal, Vermont. [G: umhm] And uh, well in fact you want to get my mother's record? The whole record is right in Bennington there. [G: Really?] Oh yeah. [G: uh huh] Yeah.

G: And now what did each set do for, for work? You were explaining about your grandfather there.

M: My grandfather? [G: The deep sea?] Yeah, he was a deep sea fisherman. He had a, a boat you know, he owned a boat that they went fishing with. And then he rescued these people off the pirate ships somewhere, you know.

G: Yeah. And there's a plaque up [M: Yeah, there's a] in New Hampshire somewhere along the coast.

M: Yeah, there's a plaque up in New Hampshire along the coast. I'd like to find it.

G: Yeah. That sounds very interesting. So they all um, one set grew up in New Hampshire and the other set was more from Southern Vermont. How did, how did anybody end up in North Adams thought? How did you?

M: Well my father met my mother. They, they went out one month together. My father met my mother at a dance in Pownal. And he used to walk to Pownal. [G: From North Adams?] Yeah. [G: Wow] He went down. She saw him about four times before she married him. [G: Laughs] They were only married forty-nine years when she died, when they died, she died. [G: Wow] Yeah.

G: That sound like a short romance [unclear] [M: Yeah] Now where, where were you born Mabel?

M: Me? I was born in Stamford, Vermont.

G: In Stamford. Can you give me the date?

M: Yes, September 27, 1909.

G: And how many, how many um, members of the family were there? Your brothers and sisters?

M: There was nine of us.

G: Nine of you all together.

M: Yeah. All, let's see, four brothers and five sisters.

G: And you said you were the youngest?

M: Yeah, I'm the youngest of nine.

G: Nine. Uh, and did you grow up in North Adams then?

M: Well mostly Clarksburg.

G: Mostly Clarksburg.

M: I lived a little bit in North Adams, but mostly Clarksburg.

G: Mostly Clarksburg. [M: Yeah] And uh, so you don't really know why your father came to this area though from New Hampshire?

M: No, he, I don't know. He just came you know. Years ago the children just went. [G: People travelled] He was nineteen, my mother was twenty-five. My mother was older than my father.

G: Yeah. Okay. Schools?

M: Me? [G: Yeah] I went to school in Clarksburg. [G: Umhm] I went to school in Vermont, but uh, [G: umhm] we couldn't (--) This is why I don't know much of anything, because I uh, we used to go at the beginning, like in September till the first snow, till they start deer hunting. Then the hunters took us for deers. So we couldn't go. [G: Oh!] And then um, (--)

G: They missed (--) They would, (--) They were afraid that you would get uh, [M: shot] shot at.

M: Well they would shoot at us. [G: Wow!] Oh yeah! They would, they would shoot at us. [G: Huh] And then uh, it snowed too much and they never plowed the road. So we didn't go again till in the Spring. [G: Hm] See?

G: So that was all through elementary school and (--)

M: No. No, I just went to (--) Well I went to the second grade and I come down here and they put me in third grade. And I didn't know anything. I shouldn't have that on there, but I didn't know anything. [Both chuckle] It's true. Your basics is your education. If your first and second grade I think are very important in school.

G: Yeah, they are. How about uh, the family's religious background? Do you, do you want to explain that a little bit?

M: Well we're catholics. [G: Umhm] My whole family was catholic, very catholic. [G: Umhm]

G: Okay. Catholic living in (--) How about um, your marriage. Now how did you meet your husband?

M: My husband was here on recruiting service. And I met him on New Years Eve at a dance.

G: At a dance. Dances were popular for meeting people I guess.

M: Yes, I guess so. We were at a Moose Lodge with my sister and my brother. We were up there and that's where I met him.

G: Umhm. And when were you married?

M: I was married in 1928.

G: Um. Now how about any of your husband's background?

M: My husband comes from England.

G: He comes from England?

M: Birmingham, around Birmingham, England. [G: Umhm] Yeah. He came to this country when he was just a boy. But he was in Canada, Frederickton, New Brunswick. That's where he was brought up. He started to work at twelve years old on a farm there. [G: Umhm] And uh, they were, weren't paying him too much money. So he skipped across the boarder and joined the American Army when he was seventeen. [G: Umhm] Even lied his age. He said he was eighteen to join the army.

G: [Laughs] And (--)

M: He was down here on recruiting service. That's how I met him.

G: Uh huh, through the army. [M: Yeah] And what did he do for employment? Did he work at Sprague's at all?

M: Yeah, he worked forty years at Sprague's, yeah.

G: Forty years.

M: Yeah, he worked all. He was group leader, foreman, and all that. He worked in Sprague's.

G: Huh. And, and your children?

M: My children?

G: Umhm. How many and (--)

M: Well I had six. One little girl died at two. Her picture's in there. And uh, let's see, I got (--) Joan worked forty years there, close to forty years in Sprague's. [G: Hm!] And then uh, let's see, Bernie works in the G.E. He's a draftsman. Chucky is the second in command in Morrison. And my oldest son, he's in Seattle, Washington. He did twenty years in the service. He served in uh, let's see. He served in uh, Korea, Vietnam, Germany, Alaska, [G: wow!] and all over. Georgia. He's been all over. He did twenty years duty. [G: Wow]

G: Well maybe um, as we get into this, in the Sprague's part of it here, do you remember what year you started? When you started?

M: I think it was 1934.

G: 1934?

M: I worked while there was a rush, and then they layed me off. And then I worked in these other plants. I worked in Wallstreeter's and then I worked in Gale. And then they sold it to [Melance?], oh no, Melancon sold it to Gale's I guess, Shoe Shop, you know. [G: Umhm] And then I'd [unclear]. And I'd worked six months, three months here and two months there. And (--)

G: All over huh?

M: Yup.

G: So during the rush is just when they had like a big order to do and they wanted to get it right out. [M: Yes, that's what] And when it was done the job was, you kind of got layed off. [M: Yeah] Was there anything like unemployment insurance then?

M: There was nothing.

G: So when you got layed off you really had to look for more work?

M: Oh yeah. You worked from one job to another. [G: Umhm] And you took everything, and you did everything.

G: Umhm. And you were saying about being married, they didn't want to keep you on?

M: No. And in [name of company unclear] they only kept single people on. They wouldn't keep a married woman on. [G: Hm] They'd keep married men, but not a woman.

G: Hm, that's interesting. So when you worked these rushes what kind of work um, did you do specifically? Was it on a line? Production?

M: Well yeah. Well sometimes I was a sam... In the shoe shop I'd be a sample girl. I'd follow the shoe right down. [G: Umhm] And like Jim Wall Shoes, they had to be perfection, you know? And we used to follow them right down the line and make sure everything was all right. [H: Huh] Yeah, it (--) I used to uh, uh let's see, stitch you know, sole, tongues, and different things you had to stitch. [G: Yeah] All down through the line I did.

G: Umhm. Now when um, when you started at Sprague's full time what uh, how did, how did that come about? How did you get the opportunity to get in there?

M: Well let's see, I think that was back (--) This is my watch I got. [G: Mmm!] See, I had it twenty-five, twenty-five years. This is my watch.

G: Wow! And that's for working there for twenty-five years you got a watch?

M: Yeah. Yeah. [G: Wow] I didn't show you my picture with R.C. Sprague did I? [G: No] We're the only married couple. I'll go get it. [G: Okay, go ahead] We're the only married couple that got our watch together, my husband and I. These are awards. [G: Huh!]

G: Okay. Let me just (--)

M: We were a quarter of a century [unclear]. [G: Um!] And uh (--)

G: So this was taken, you and your husband (--)

M: Yeah, my husband was a foreman when this was taken. Foreman at Sprague's.

G: With the boss there, huh? [M: Yeah] Well that's pretty good.

M: Yeah. We were the only couple. That's R.C. You know R.C.?

G: Oh sure, yes. [Comment unclear]

M: How does he feel now, do you know?

G: Gee I don't know really.

M: Last time I saw him he didn't look too well.

G: Yeah. Well there's a lot of things [unclear].

M: Yeah, I feel bad about him.

G: Um, let's continue down the list here. Now let's see. Okay, you started in 1934 and it was just sort of [unclear] time.

M: I think it was 1936 before we got going steady. [G: Okay] Yeah. Well then the war broke out, you know, and so.

G: Uh huh. When you got on going steady was it for um, a specific reason? Did they have a lot more work to do and that's why you kind of got steady, more work?

M: Oh yeah! Yeah, all kinds of work came in. Even Walls came in down there. [G: Umhm] Um, I never, I didn't work on Walls project there, but uh, [G: Uh huh] I was in the MICA Department.

G: Mica? [M: Yeah] Now what, what was that?

M: It was two (--) There's a silver MICA and a regular MICA Department. [G: Umhm] And first it was on, on uh, up the Beaver and then they moved it down on Brown Street on the top floor. [G: Uh huh] Then I worded in industrial oils. Rolls, stacks, all kinds of jobs. Riveting. Poured.

G: Huh. Now in the MICA though what was, what did you have to do there?

M: Well you take the little pieces of MICA and you put a little piece of MICA down the bottom. You put a foil over, and another piece of MICA. You had to count so many foils and so many MICAs had to be in. Yeah.

G: Oh, for one little part? [M: Yeah] That was the actual little part to (--)

M: Oh yeah. These were condensers. These went into uh, well radios and [G: Umhm, all kinds] machine guns. Anything. [G: Yeah (unclear)] Even made (--) Uh, let's see, the silver MICA you made little things for hearing aids. [G: Hm] And we also made (--) This I got. It's suppose to be on, in the moon. [G: Yeah] It's suppose to be the size of a silver dollar. [G: Uh huh] And I mean, you had to use it with a magnifying glass to roll these with silver. And you, it had to be gold and silver threads. [G: Umhm] And the only way you could do it, you had glasses on and plus [G: plus a microscope] It had to be weaved in there. And this little thing is up on the moon. [G: Really] Yeah. I don't know how many put a silver dollar. It's suppose to last forever. Because only gold and silver lives up there with the sun hitting it.

G: Ummm! It doesn't uh, melt away or anything.

M: No, it doesn't melt away. [G: Huh] So if they go up there they might find it someday. [Both chuckle]

G: So that, that was like one of the jobs you had. Now you, you said another one was in the oil?

M: Industrial oil. [G: Industrial oil] It's still going on, industrial oil is still here.

G: Uh. Now what, what goes in that job? What did you have to do for that one?

M: Well you had to fill (--) Well first we had a rolo section. They had to be rolled.

G: What had to be rolled? The little parts?

M: No. Well they make condensers. They're round like you know, and they roll them. Let's see if I got some of them upstairs. They roll them you know. [G: Oh!] And uh, then you had to fill them up in oil. And then they have to go into um, oh, where they test them. [G: Umhm] It's a lot from the beginning to the end, you know.

G: Yeah, it does.

M: And you have to rivet wires on them. And you have to put the ovens on. Seal it. Seal, I did that too. Sealing the cans. You have to fill them up, seal them. Then you have to, they have little holes and you have to put a dob of mic...um, lead on them. A dob of lead.

G: Like solder you mean?

M: Solder on them. [G: Solder?] Yeah.

G: Oh! Now how long did it take you to do that one little process with the oil? Did it take long to do each one?

M: Well not that long. You had to do so many. You're on bonus. Most of the time you're on bonus. [G: Uh huh] And so you have to do some and then. But got to make sure they're right, because you have to do them over again if they ain't right.

G: Oh do you?

M: Oh yeah.

G: You'd use the same one and then have to fix it?

M: Oh yeah! [G: Huh] Oh yeah.

G: So they want, they had a high quality?

M: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, they, that's one thing, they tested a lot. [G: Unclear] In fact my son almost got (--) The one that was in the service, he almost got killed. They had these, they have to wire them in these big cages. They, that still goes on in Sprague's down there. [G: Yeah? Huh] And um, he went in there and the thing that was suppose to cut, throw the switch, you know (--)

G: Umhm, the circuit breaker?

M: Yeah, and it didn't. In fact one man got (--) What was his name. He died. He got electrocuted there. And my son went in after that and he almost got it. Two days before



Christmas.

G: Wow! It didn't work right. It malfunctioned, [M: Yeah, something went, yeah] or something went wrong and (--) Where they were, they were tested they must have been putting an electrical charge [unclear]?

M: Yeah. Oh yeah, they were all charged. They were all charged in this cage. They have to run wires on all of these units. They were little units, big units, all kind of units, but they're all charged.

G: Oh, and they, they tested them all in one spot?

M: Oh yes!

G: Hm, and it didn't, the circuit breaker didn't go off and?

M: No. Well one fellow got (--) I forgot who he was. We didn't do a think that night he got killed.

G: They stopped production?

M: No. Nobody did anything. [G: Really] They took his body out you know, it was terrible.

G: Oh. Was it, you were there that night then. Was it a [unclear?]

M: I wasn't in that room. I was in another room. I was in the assembling part of it.

G: Oh. Was there a lot of noise, or a big bang, or?

M: No, no there wasn't. [G: No?] Just kind of bang, [snaps fingers] go like that.

G: Wow! Hm. Well what were some of the other ones. Now you worked in the MICA and the Industrial Oil, and (--)

M: Well the first job I have I worked uh, what they call that now? Poor man's dead now. Up the Beaver it was. We didn't have these other plant at the time. And that was for Frank Gassett. [G: Umhm] And uh, that was a bad time. [G: Yeah?] Yeah. This is before we had a union. I helped form the union.

G: Did you really? [M: A few of us] Well good. We'll get on that more.

M: Well today I guess the union ain't no good, but then it was good. First, well then you couldn't get work. They had uh, (--) I had walked from here down there was two miles. [G: Uh huh] And I couldn't punch in till the work came down the line. [G: Hm!] And then sometimes I wouldn't even work at all. They'd send me back home. And I'd no more then get back home, I'd have to walk back down. It's two miles down, two miles back. And I had to pay a girl three

dollars a week. It ain't much, but I was only getting \$9.80 a week.

G: For, to keep track of the children you mean? [M: Yeah!] Oh. Now they wouldn't let you punch in until work actually got in front of you? [M: Yeah] Um!

M: Yeah. And then they had the foreman's wives were working with them. Their aunts, their uncles and brothers, you name it were working for them. That was bad! [G: Uhhh!] So we formed ICW I first. [G: Uh huh] The first thing we did, they had to get rid of, the foreman's couldn't have any member of their families working for them anymore. That was the first thing we did. The next thing we did, they had to guarantee us four hours of work, [G: Umhm] which was no more than right you know. [G: Sure] And they had (--) [G: Because you had to walk down (unclear)] And then they had to try, like when we went in, if the wives and them, they had to have the gravy. No gravy. It had to be divided equally. The good and bad. [G: Umhm] That was the thing that we did.

G: Hard work and easy work. Everybody got a little bit of everything.

M: Yeah, well that's no more than right, you know? [G: Umhm] Whether you're old or young, or anything, it's no more than right. [G: Huh] But it was terrible!

G: Well did you have a group? How did you form? I mean a lot of people must have been a little angry at the way it was run?

M: Well we all got together [laughs] [G: uh huh] and we went to see Mr. Shuggs.

G: Who is he?

M: He was General Manager. [G: Umhm] Yeah but he was connected, well he helped R.C. get going anyhow. [G: Uh huh] And he was uh, Navy, a big Navy man. In fact when World War II broke out he, they called him back into the Navy. [G: Really! Hm] And then what, oh I'm trying to think who the other (--) They were more, they were right with us working with us all the time, you know.

G: Umhm, so you got to see him almost everyday then. So.

M: Yeah, we got to see them quite often, you know.

G: Umhm. So they're like your immediate supervisors other than the foreman.

M: Yeah, but he was, no, but he was the manager. [G: Unclear] He was a general manager. He was general manager, but see he knew a lot about electronics. Mr. Shuggs, he was a very nice man.

G: Umhm. So how many were there? Like a hundred, or ten people, or how many people got angry enough to go up to talk to him? Do you remember if it was a large (--)

M: Well it must have been a hundred or more. [G: Um] Yeah, when they started, of course it started to spread. You know, they started bringing different departments you know, all the way through. [G: Umhm] I wish I could remember all of the names of the departments, because I worked in a lot of them.

G: Now did that happen (--)

M: So like the dry rolling. They had the dry rolling, you know. [G: And that was when?] Um, Adam Novack was the foreman there. And George [unclear] was a foreman, general foreman. [G: Uh huh] Yeah. [G: Wow!] And then Mr. Martin up in the MICA Department up the Beaver, he was general foreman up there. [G: Huh] See.

G: Well do you remember when that union was formed? What year, or?

M: Well it must have been, let's see, '34, '35, maybe '36.

G: '36? And that was, you had been there a couple of years working a little bit.

M: Yeah, just about two years about working. Yeah. Yeah.

G: Gee, that's something to help form a, the first union.

M: Then it broke up and we started an ICW #II. [G: Umhm] See of course now I guess they got IUE in there. [G: Umhm] But uh, that's what we had to do.

G: Did everybody have to vote? Was it like uh (--)

M: Oh yeah, we had to vote. Everybody had to vote. Yeah.

G: Umhm. Whether you wanted (--)

M: Then uh, Stackpole was the head of the ICW II. [G: Uh huh] Williamstown. You know Stackpole don't you? [G: Sure do] He's a good guy. You could get a lot of information from that. [G: laughs] Yeah, Stackpole. I always got along good with Stackpole. Some didn't, but I always got along.

G: Uh huh. Well that sounds really interesting. So, so the union was formed and that helped to alleviate a lot of the problems?

M: Well you had to my goodness. Of course then later on we got like uh, med uh, medical health and all like that. Your insurance, life insurance and different things like that we got in. [G: Umhm]

G: Did the first union set like a minimum wage that they had to pay?

M: No, there wasn't too much. No they didn't. [G: No?] After awhile they did. We kept asking

for raises. [G: Umhm] Oh we even took a cut one time. [G: Hm! Can you tell me when that was?] Let's see. They gave us, they'd give us two cents an hour. One time we got to thirty-five cents an hour we were getting. [G: Umhm] Then I don't know what (--) I forgot what happened there. But uh, oh, Sprague's was going to go bankrupt.

G: Do you remember when that was?

M: And we took, we worked one week for nothing.

G: A whole week?

M: A whole week for nothing. [G: Hm] But it save the plant. It saved it.

G: Do you remember when that was? What year?

M: No. Well it was (--) I don't know. I couldn't tell you exactly. Maybe some of the other people could tell you that.

G: In the thirties though you think, or forties?

M: No, in the thirties. [G: In the thirties] It was before the war. Before uh, World War II. Just before that.

G: Hm, that's interesting.

M: Yeah, we saved them. They wouldn't have a thing, because he was going to go bankrupt.

G: Huh, wow! So you think everybody worked without a pay for a week?

M: Everybody worked without a pay for that one week. And then we took a cut on top of it.

G: Oh, and then after that you had a cut?

M: Yeah, oh yeah. We took a cut.

G: My, well that must have been towards the, in the depression years?

M: It was. It was just about the depression time a little bit, depression time.

G: Umhm. Um, let's see. Now other departments you worked in. You said you don't remember them all, but do you remember some more? [Laughs]

M: Well I don't know. The dry rolling was another department I worked in.

G: Umhm. And you had to roll out the, the [unclear]?

M: Oh, the first one we rolled, we used to roll them in soup. They used to have a, uh, there used to be a part in the center. And then there was a girl on each end. And then there was a girl on two sides. And they'd have foil. [G: Umhm] And there was some paper. Some kind of electronic paper. We'd put the paper in a foil, the paper in a foil. And he time we had this soup with a brush. We would spread the soup with the brush. And then we would, this stuff would be good and hot and it made our fingers all blistered. And we'd roll and had to roll them and make sure we'd roll them so they'd be good and tight. And then we'd have (--)

G: Did you have gloves?

M: Huh?

G: Did you have any gloves?

M: No gloves. You couldn't roll them with gloves. [G: Anyway] No.

G: Yeah, but you must not have like to roll them if they were very hot?

M: Well you had to do it. You got used to it after awhile. You got used top it.

G: This was something you had to do to work, huh?

M: Yeah.

G: You know, you know talking about that, was there many safety things? Did you ever have any goggles that you had to wear, or that kind of thing?

M: Oh no. None there. You did on riveting. If you were riveting, or anything like that, or welding, [G: Umhm] you had to wear glasses. Oh yeah, on that you did. [G: Protective] But later on they changed this process. They put on machines, we rolled them with machines. You had to, you had to load your machine with different foil, different papers, you know. They still have some of those machines here I think. [G: Yeah] Yeah.

G: So well did that happen while you were in the department, that you went from doing it manually to on a machine?

M: Yeah, yeah, I did it. Oh yeah, that was a lot better.

G: Did it take you awhile to learn the new system?

M: No, not too much.

G: Not too much. And you think it was a lot better huh?

M: Oh yeah, it was a lot better than doing it in hot wat... hot soup. [Chuckles] We used to call it soup. It's some kind of, it was sort of white you know. [G: Uh huh] It's like a, more like a

paste. But it wasn't heavy, it was more thin.

G: Did you have to make the soup up yourself, or did that come from somewhere else?

M: No, we used to mix it on top in this pan that we had.

G: Do you remember what it was made from? What kind of material?

M: No, I don't remember.

G: Okay. It sounds interesting though. Other departments? Anything else? Different jobs that you worked that you can remember?

M: No. All I can think (--) Let's see. I can't remember the name of the department. There was one foreman. He left us and he went up in Illinois. Can't remember his name.

G: Uh huh. Well they were just different production type of jobs?

M: Yeah, different. Yeah, different. Yeah for different things you had to have stuff for the Air Force, and some for the submarines. Oh, that's another department I worked, the submarines. What they called uh, Black Beauties.

G: And what was that?

M: That was down, that was down on Brown Street the Black Beauties were. [G: Uh huh] And that was, those units were very important, because uh, um, some of these went in the submarines and it had to be (--) In fact I think, I'm not sure, but I think we had a spy working with us one time. [G: No] Yeah. [G: huh] And uh, well we had to put little coils. And at the bottom that was real silver. [G: Umhm] And they would substitute foil in it. [G: Umhm] And that when the submarine would go under water it would sink, it wouldn't be able to come back up. This, whatever this, I forgot the name of the units.

G: Some kind of gauge to help [float?]. [M: But uh, yeah] Uh huh.

M: But this would, the submarine, the soldiers would have died. You know, the marines would die.

G: So somebody you believe was doing that? A spy, or?

M: It disappeared. This girl, I forgot what her name, they said that wasn't her name. She disappeared. That Jack Washman got, that was kept very quiet. [M: Huh] All we knew the girl was missing. And all of a sudden this rumors came around, you know.

G: That the, the product wasn't being made right?

M: Yeah. [G: Huh] Well you see those products, they were examined very well. And some of

the girls caught it, an inspector. See, we had, I'd inspect it too. The girls that were inspector, we made sure. And when you run them on a gauge there to, to see what the voltage is one them you know, [G: umhm] if something is wrong, that's where they caught it right away. Because those, they were inspected three, four times before they were even ready to ship [few words unclear].

G: That many times huh?

M: Oh yeah, more than that some times. Oh yeah. If one was wrong they'd throw the whole [G: unclear], they done that a lot. Silver MICA they did that a lot too.

G: In the MICA department?

M: Oh yeah. Any department. If anything was caught wrong out it went.

G: Hm. Well what happened if, if um, (--) Do they know who was making them wrong? What would they do if they said that gee, half of the stuff you make is wrong.

M: Well I don't know what they did with her. They fired her and then she just disappeared. I don't know what, whether they put her in jail [chuckles], I don't know what they did. Nobody knows, seems to know what happened to the girl.

G: Huh. That's interesting. Now you said you were an inspector at one time. What did you have to inspect? Different items, or?

M: Well, well you inspect the units that come through. You know, all the condensers, the units that come through, you inspect them all.

G: Umhm. And how did you do that? You had some kind of gauge to put them through?

M: Oh yeah. [G: Umhm] Oh yeah, you had to make sure they don't leak and everything is all right on them.

G: Uh huh, that's pretty good. What was um, I don't know if you can, if you can remember really, but what was a typical day um, like before, or after the union. You kind of told me before the union where you'd go home and walk back and forth, but how about after the union got in? What was a typical day? Uh like, where you punched in at a certain time?

M: Oh, we punched in and we worked our four hours and we come home. [G: Umhm] But uh, then sometime they would call us back again, but we'd, they'd have to pay us another four hours. [G: Uh huh] Oh yeah, that was a lot (--) But then after that when the war broke out, well we worked eight hours a day, nine hours. An average of nine hours. [G: Umhm] At first they didn't want, (--)

A couple of times we worked ten hours, but then they made it nine hours.

G: Um. Now did you work Monday through Friday, or Saturday also?

M: Oh sometimes Saturday. Monday through Friday, Saturdays, oh yeah. [G: Umhm] Some of them worked even on Sunday then during the war. [G: Umhm] Oh yeah.

G: Was there overtime back then, or did you get a straight salary? [M: Hm?] Overtime pay?

M: Uh, no, just straight time.

G: It was all straight time.

M: But later on they had overtime. But uh, at first it was just standard time.

G: Hm, no matter how much you worked you got to do something else.

M: Yeah, but after they, then after if you work, after six o'clock what if they give you ten percent, you know?

G: After six o'clock they give you a little bonus [unclear]?

M: Oh yeah, let's see. One time I work from six to two-thirty. Then another time I worked two-thirty to eleven. Another time I worked eight to five. You know, whatever shift you could get.

G: Different shifts. Well how many shifts did they run, do you know? Do you remember how many they were running?

M: Oh one time we had clock, around the clock one time. Oh yeah, twenty-four hours a day they was. Oh yeah.

G: That was during the war like?

M: Oh yeah, that was twenty-four hours a day.

G: There was plenty of work to do.

M: Yeah. [G: Umhm] In the old MICA Department it was rolling, stack, no stacking and uh, let's see. She'd say, all these wires. I'd like, maybe I'll go through the whole machine with you. But there must have been a hundred stackers. [G: Huh.] I think the three shifts, there was three hundred stackers for each shift.

G: You just had to stack them?

M: Yeah, well you have to stack these condensers. You put them in these little jigs, they called them jigs. And you, some you only use five MICAs with the, the foil and stuff, but others you have to use more. Sometimes you made big ones, sometimes you made little ones.

G: Um, depending on what the order was for maybe.



M: Yeah, yeah, whatever they're using them for.

G: Hm. Well how about um, changes in the wages that you earned? Um, say like what, do you remember what you started at and what you ended at Sprague?

M: Well I was just starting to make money when I had to quit. [G: Oh no] When I was forced to quit. And all we started at, let's see. I made, we were working I think twenty-cents an hour. [G: Umhm] Well it was \$9.80 a week. So you figure. [Both chuckle] And then uh, if you were on bonus you made \$11.26. [G: Uh huh] And uh, then uh, we kept getting two cents an hour. Then we had what, one strike. And then we had, then we got a little increase. Then we got uh, hospitalization and all of this. And then we had another strike for a raise. [G: Uh huh] Then we had a third strike. That was 19, let's see, I think 1986 was the last time we had a strike. [G: Huh] Yeah. [G: Wow] We lost out on that strike though.

G: That was a tough one for everybody.

M: Yeah, somebody uh, well they kind of got made a Stackpole. [G: Uh huh] Yeah.

G: Yeah, strike aren't too much fun sometimes [M: no] I don't think. Well how about the wages between the men and the women? Do you know how (--) Well you know how your husband [unclear].

M: Oh you could do the same work the man did, but you, you got less money. [Chuckles] I think that goes on today.

G: Really? Yeah, it probably does.

M: Well yeah there is. Cause I read it in the paper once in awhile on TV. Sometimes it comes on.

G: Was it a big difference do you know?

M: Well just maybe two or three cents an hours, I don't think. Maybe five cents an hour. That's all it was. [G: Umhm] But it amounts to a lot at the end of the week, you know. Five cents an hour. Five cents here, five cents there.

G: Yeah, yeah. So the benefits you say like insurance um, came after strikes. So you had to sort of force to get it.

M: Yeah, we had to fight for everything. Everything we got we had to fight for. [G: Umhm] All the way.

G: Um, as you worked in different departments were they like promotions with increases in pay, or (--)

M: Well not necessarily. [G: Umhm] Well sometimes they were better jobs. So I'd sign up for

a better job. Like the last time I worked in Sprague's I was down on Brown Street. And that foreman was, in fact I see him once in awhile now, uh, he used to like the young girls, and I was an old lady. So he didn't want no old lady, you know? [G: Laughs] And uh, Bill [Bunton?] his name is. [G: Umhm] But he got fired.

G: He got fired?

M: Yeah.

G: Did he do something wrong?

M: Well he used to come in and work. [G: Umhm] And I got out of there because he was riding me, you know? [G: Umhm] And Mike, that department, I was the only, I got the least reject of rolling in that department than any, any other girl that rolled with me. [G: Umhm] Umhm. But he wanted some young girls. And he tried to get rid of us old ladies, you know? [G: Hm] So I signed out of there.

G: Is that why he got fired?

M: No, he didn't get fired for that. He got, he did get fired because uh, him and this engineer, they used to go down and watch the races, or he was working down the races. And he was suppose to be in Sprague's. That's (--)

G: At the same time huh? [Laughs]

M: Yeah.

G: He got caught.

M: Gee, I better not get his name on there, he might sue me. [Laughs]

G: Oh no, I don't think so. I don't think so. [M: unclear] Well he uh, let's see. Now in that department you said it was a better job, right? And it was a little bit better wage? If you had a better job you'd get a little more money?

M: Yeah, yes. Some of the jobs you get a little bit more. [G: Umhm] Not much more.

G: You said you signed up for it. Is that how you changed jobs?

M: Well I came to the [Tantlum?] I left that department and (--) See, they post. When there's a job opening they're posted in all the plants. Of course we had the three plants. [G: Umhm] Well is we saw a job we would sign it. And then uh, you'd get called in on them. So that's when I got (--) I was just starting to really make money when I had to quit. Funny how I turned sixty-five so I had to get out. [G: Uhh, {unclear}] Then I was really starting. I really didn't make much money that about one year. [G: Huh] I think 1974 I had to quit. '75.

G: Hm. So they post the jobs and, and they call you in if they thought you might be better at it, and they give you a try-out at it? [M: Yeah] What happened if you didn't work out on that job? Would they let you go back to the other one?

M: No, you just worked out. You usually worked out though. No of the jobs were that bad.

G: Yeah. All together do you know how many different departments you worked for?

M: Well I don't know. If they got twenty I worked in twenty of them. [Laughs]

G: Really? You worked in all of them huh?

M: Yeah, yeah. I went from one floor to another.

G: Well you must have got to know quite a few people then?

M: Yeah. Well most of the people I know their first name, I don't know their last name.

G: Oh that's okay. It's probably what it is with most people. [M: Yup] Well let's see. Do you know if many, if there were many uh, health or safety problems in any of the jobs you had? Um, did people become ill because of what they were doing?

M: Well some claim the MICA dust. One girl claim the MICA dust. Well she die, [G: umhm] but uh, it caused her TB and she died. I don't know if it was true or not. [G: Umhm] So I can't say.

G: Well that must have been a long time ago huh?

M: Yeah.

G: Umhm. Well as you were going, as you were working through the years you must have seen um, some improvement in the surrounding working conditions. Um, do you think (--)

M: Oh yeah. There was a lot of improvement. All the machinery was updated and all new machinery and everything. Oh yeah. [G: Umhm] Down the whole line. Sometime you followed the product right down the line. [G: Uh huh] If you started in the department sometime we'd do the beginning, and the middle, and the end, and right down through.

G: All one person would?

M: Yeah. Oh yeah, you did that.

G: Would continue. [M: Oh yeah] Umhm. Um, how about um, sort of the, the structure of, of your uh, of a department? Now you had all the workers and then who was, who was the supervisor above the work force there in a department? Was there just a foreman?

M: Well no, no, no. The foreman, there was a general foreman. The Superintendent, the General Foreman, the Foreman, and the Group Leader, or Supervisors.

G: Well you had a group leader too then. A group leader must have had a few [unclear].

M: Well he was like a supervisor. A group leader was like a supervisor, you know.

G: Umhm. Now did you hold any of those other positions? Did you ever become a supervisor, or (--)

M: No. No.

G: You just worked on the line?

M: No, I worked on production.

G: Yeah.

M: All the time.

G: Uh huh. Um, how about um, relationships with the supervisors though? Did, did you always get along with like uh, the next one up, or (--)

M: I always got along with them all. [G: Umhm] Even the one I signed out with there. I didn't, (--) All I know he was giving me a lot of pressure. And he was, I know he wanted to get rid of me, because he got rid of other people. [G: Umhm] And he wanted young girls so we got out.

G: Umhm. So you just saw another job posted and you applied for it?

M: Just, I didn't, I didn't bother fighting with him. I wouldn't fight with him. I never had no trouble. [G: Uh huh] I worked in Sprague's thirty-nine, never had no trouble with any of them. I never had any trouble with the girls either. [G: Umhm] Never had any time to talk anyhow. And I never (--) If I went to the lady's room and they were discussing trying to run somebody down, I never joined in that. I stayed out of trouble.

G: You tried to stay out, mind your own business.

M: I mind my own business.

G: And you're happier that way.

M: No, and I wouldn't, I wouldn't repeat anything the girls, this girl said about that girl, that girl said about that one.

G: Yeah, it'll get you in trouble fast. Well how about personal relationships now, and how you

got along with uh, everybody. Did you form many um, long time relationships? I know you moved from a lot of departments. Did you get to know anybody very well?

M: Well yeah. We got (--) Yeah, let's see. Well I got to know a lot of them, you know. We got (--) Let's see. I was trying to think of who would go to these banquets and all. We would go with them, you know. [G: Uh huh] [Ruffling through some paper] Jack Washburn. You know Jack Washburn. Gee, I can't think of anybody else. A whole lot of them we did, we used to be together.

G: Yeah. Well if you get around like that you probably met a lot of nice people.

M: I was trying to think of some of the other foremen I would (--) A couple of them have died. [G: Umhm] In fact my, one of my foreman's just died. Ziggy Nash. [G: Uh huh] He was a very nice man. He just was buried about a month ago huh?

G: What department was that in? Do you remember?

M: He was in the rolling department. [G: Umhm] Yeah. [G: Um, let's see] He took over somebody else's job. Somebody had to quit, and he took over.

G: And he became the foreman? [M: Yeah] Was there much social life formed because of, of working at Sprague's? Did you ever um, see other people after work, or you know, go out with the (--)

M: Oh yes, Minnie Sokel, she worked in the main, in uh, in the main office. She was on production. She finally got into the main office on a special work there. [G: Uh huh] Oh yeah, a lot of girls. We used to, when we (--) They had all the banquets. We all, were all with them people.

G: Yeah. [M: yeah] How about um, child care responsibilities? How did you managed uh, a family. You said you had six children. It's a good size family. [M: Yeah] And, and working at the same time, especially full time.

M: Well I had, I had different people, most of them my own family took care of them. [G: Umhm] But uh, I used to, I had a cousin babysitting for me. [G: Umhm] But then I used to kind of work at like, I told you I worked from 6:00-2:30. [G: Umhm] Well I had (--) See, my husband wouldn't go to work until 8:00. So the kids went, the children went to school. So he'd drop them off at school. [G: Umhm] And then at 2:30 when they come out of school I'd pick them up and bring them home. You know, then I'd be with them most of the time. Yeah. [G: Hm] We most (--) And then my father would watch them. We mostly my brother-in-law, my sister used to watch them. We used to mostly kept it in the family.

G: Umhm. [M: Oh yeah] Did you have to pay much back then? Did you pay your relatives for watching them a little, or?

M: Oh yeah, it was only three dollars a week, but I was only getting a little bit you know. And I

got to be, fifteen dollars was big wages. Eighteen dollars wow!

G: [Chuckles] And, and probably after a certain point the olde one probably kind of looked after the younger ones too, so you didn't need too much.

M: No, no no.

G: Umhm. Um, how did you feel about, about the um, changes in the, in your different departments? Like how did um, oh let's see. The different uh, the different work. Did you, did you like doing the different kinds of things? Was it boring or (--)

M: No, I don't (--). I liked doing all the work. [G: Uh huh] Yeah.

G: And you said you didn't have too much time to (--)

M: I'm just trying to think of the last foreman I worked for. He just got, he just quit. He just retired. [G: Umhm] Yeah. In fact my niece works in that department now. Um, Pauline Boland. [G: Uh huh] She works in that department. And they moved the plant down on [unclear] highway there. [G: Uh huh] She works in Tantlun.

G: Tantlun?

M: That's the good, best department they got right now. They pay good wages there. That's where I got my best wages.

G: What do they do in that department?

M: Well from the beginning a whole lot. It starts at one end. Now let's see, I was like in the middle of it. [G: Umhm] You had to test them and gauge it, gauge the units. Gauge [unclear] so the gauge is all right. Some people assemble them. We got them, gauged them, make sure they were right. [G: Umhm] What's good we keep, what ain't good we throw out.

G: Umhm. So you sort of tested them then? [M: Yeah] Yeah. What was the hardest part of uh, the jobs that you did. What was, were there many difficult?

M: Oh yeah, a lot of them were difficult. If it was too slow you'd lose your bonus. You wouldn't make any money, you know? [G: Umhm] You had to maintain 15% in order to stay on a job. If you didn't make 15% (--)

G: Now 15% of what?

M: Of (-)

G: Of a certain amount, or? [M: a certain amount] So you had to have a (-) You mean like the department had to make a hundred a day? [M: Yeah] And you had to make so much of that. [M: Yeah] That amount and then if you had a bonus (--)

M: Well different jobs you had to do more work you know. Some you only uh, there's some (--) Now when you assemble things for the TV here, you know your push buttons? [G: Umhm] That was in the Union Street Plant. We assembled them. And uh, you had little wires. You had to cut, (--) I know how to pull a TV apart. Show you how to, all those little wires that you had. And those had to be tested. See. [G: Yeah] And see that all the wires are right. Oh yeah.

G: Huh. So that was kind of tough doing [M: yeah], doing that.

M: Well that, that you could only assemble three of them in, in fifteen minutes.

G: They had it timed like?

M: Oh yeah, they time you. Oh yeah, you were timed. You had to do so many units in so many minutes. [G: Umhm] Some, some you had to do a lot. And some, three, that was a lot, three, because you had their biggest. They were a big unit like that. You know, you have push buttons.

G: Uh huh. Yeah, yeah.

M: You know, some things have a lot of push buttons. Well, [G: then you had] those panels, they called them panels.

G: Yeah. Hm. And some of them were easier. And you had to do a lot more of them?

M: Oh yeah. When they were easier you had to do more of them, when they were hard you do less.

G: Umhm. How did they determine that you could do three of them in fifteen minutes?

M: Well you have a syst... Uh, what they call them now? In fact I see him, when he used to live up near me here, Art Caron? [G: Umhm] Yeah, they had a clock you know. And they time you with a clock. Yeah.

G: Hm. Did, did they time everybody?

M: Eddy Goodman was one of them. [G: Umhm] He was an awful nice guy Eddy Goodman. He gave you, some gave you a bad rate, but he gave you a pretty good rate. If you did your work and work along he would give you a decent rate. But if tried to, you couldn't put nothing over on him.

G: Yeah, [chuckles]. If you tried to go a little easier he knew it, huh? [M: Yeah, you bet] So every, every person in a department was timed as to how fast they did everything.

M: Oh yeah, oh yes.

G: How often did they do that?

M: Whenever a new job came up they set a new rate on it, a rate on it. [G: Oh!] Yeah.

G: So that's, that's right. You'd work on a specific job and then that would be done. And then there was a new job to move on to.

M: Yeah.

G: Hm. Well what was the easiest part? Was there anything that was really easy to do?

M: Well I think mostly is uh, testing or gauging is the most easiest. Rolling and all of that, some of that is hard. Some of the rolling some of the girls couldn't do it. [G: Umhm] Like if you had to put uh, uh, rolling with these condensers, and you had to bring a tab into certain position. [G: Umhm] You'd roll and you'd have to make so many turns on the machine. There was counters on the machine. [G: Umhm] And you'd slip these tabs in where the, they belong, you know. You had to put four tabs, six tabs. [G: Umhm] Sometimes only one tab.

G: Umhm. And some people couldn't keep up with it.

M: No. Some couldn't do it. What they called a center tab, they couldn't do it. Some girls couldn't do it.

G: Hm, well how long did they, did they try them out before they said you can't do it? [M: Huh?] Did they try it for a day, or give them a week, or?

M: Oh no. Oh they, they knew right away they couldn't do it.

G: Uh, they just tried them for an hour maybe and if they couldn't do it (--)

M: Yeah, they couldn't do it. Some couldn't do it.

G: If they didn't catch on right away they didn't get the job. [M: No] What did they do? Did they get layed off, or (--)

M: Oh no. They got on some other easier, another job, you know.

G: Something they could handle.

M: Yeah, they couldn't handle that. A lot of them couldn't [unclear].

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS



Begins with Mabel in mid-sentence:

M: Novak, he got killed on Kearn Highway. Remember Adam Novak? He got, he was going home from work and a drunk driver hit him head on, you know?

G: Head on. Oh that was around the turn like?

M: I don't know where it was, but it was gown going on Kearn Highway. [G: Yeah] He was killed.

G: So some of the easy jobs, you didn't get enough of them.

M: No I didn't. I didn't because they couldn't do it. If they'd run out of the center tabs then I'd get an easy job. Then I would (--) But I made good on the other job, but I made more money on the easy jobs.

G: Because you could do them faster? Is that (--)

M: Oh yeah, you put more, you know.

G: Umhm. Well how did the bonus rate work? Um, if you did so many pieces more?

M: Yeah, you had to do so many pieces an hour. [G: Umhm] You know.

G: Did they average out a day, because you worked several hours?

M: I worked eight hours a day, [G: umhm] or nine hours a day. You had to do so many pieces in an hour.

G: Umhm. Who counted them? Did you have to count your own?

M: Oh, you kept track of your own, but somebody checked them on the other end.

G: To make sure that you had the right amount?

M: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

G: Umhm. Um, well we covered a little bit of these things. Do you remember any conflicts? [M: What?] Do you remember any conflicts? No specifically between and yourself, because you said you got along well with supervisors and management. Do you remember if other people had many problems dealing with the supervisors, or foreman, or other people?

M: Not too many. Not too many.

G: Umhm.

M: If some girls, you know, some people they'd hang around too much, but they, they didn't uh, not too much.

G: Well let's, let's talk about the strikes a little bit? You remember the first strike? Yeah. [Both laugh] Um, that first strike, do you remember how it started?

M: I don't know. We just all walked out? Everybody. I forgot who was there. My husband might have helped that along. [G: Uh huh] And uh, let's see. My brother in law was working there. Freddy Pellerin was working there at the time. And um, Carpenter, a fellow by the name of Carpenter. We all walked out anyhow. [G: Umhm] On Beaver Street. That was the Beaver, the other plants weren't around when the first strike started. [G: Uh huh] But then after the second strike, [G: there were more] yeah. Then the last strike, uh, we were all down [unclear] you know, [G: Umhm] when we were told to go back to work. We went out what was it, we wanted fifteen cents. We had ended going back for two and a half cents. Weren't we mad that time.

G: That was the last strike?

M: Yeah.

G: You wanted a fifteen cent raise, but you only ended up with a two and a half?

M: Yeah, yeah.

G: Hm. Wow!

M: They never gave us much of a raise though. An average of two cents. I don't think we got, ever got more than that. [G: Hm] Two and a half that time was a big raise.

G: Wow, and that's an hour? [M: Um] Two and a half cents an hour. Hm. Well how about uh, you said you were involved a little bit in the union. Can you explain that any, any further in the first part? You said the first part of the union.

M: Well when we'd have our meeting you know, you'd bring goodies down and everybody would eat.

G: You'd make them.

M: Yeah. And then we had the, when we had the strike on Union Street, in fact [Dagnoli?] you know, the undertaker? [M: Yeah] He was an engineer working on Union Street there. I forgot what they called those units in that, in that uh, department. I worked there. He was down there. He would bring us coffee and donuts in the morning. Of course we'd let him in, but we wouldn't let nobody else in, you know. So in order to get money we had to picket. So we'd picket back and forth.

G: Walk back and forth. And that was during the, during the day you'd, you'd go down in the

morning and you'd (--) [M: Yeah, yeah] But you'd let him in because everybody liked him because he brought coffee?

M: Well engineers. We'd let the engineers and the foreman and stuff like that. [G: Uh] There's some girls go in, but you know there's still scabs today. [G: Yeah] And when you see them, they'll be scabs as long as they live.

G: So that's, that's like uh production workers that go in anyway. [M: Yeah, they go in] They don't, they don't care about the other stuff.

M: If you picket you got I think it was twenty dollars a week. But if you didn't picket you didn't get no money.

G: Who gave you the twenty dollars?

M: The union. [G: Uuh!] See we had to pay dues in the union. [G: Umhm] And they saved these dues up and then you know, and some of the officers got paid in the union. I never got to be an officer. I didn't want it anyhow.

G: Uh huh. Well how much were to dues were when they first started? Do you remember? How much did it (--)

M: Ten cents.

G: Ten cents? [M: Yeah] That was a week?

M: A week. Ten cents a week. Then they went up to a quarter. I think now they're a dollar a week. I'm not sure. I think they're a dollar a week now, I'm not sure what they are. I think they were a dollar when I quit. Maybe they're two now. But [chuckles] (--)

G: And they paid you twenty dollars and that was because you weren't getting a regular weeks pays. They gave you something anyways. [M: Yeah] Now at that point was there any unemployment then, or [unclear]?

M: No unemployment. You couldn't, you can't draw, when you're on a strike you can't draw unemployment. [G: Uh, okay] No, you can't draw unemployment.

G: Hm. So there's no help at all really?

M: [Coughs] No. No. We went ferning, my husband and I. We picked ferns and sold them. We had, one of them was in September and that's the ferning season. We made better on ferning. We made more money than we did working eight hours in Sprague's. We didn't go ferning that long. You know what ferning is?

G: No, what is it?

M: Well you go to the undertaker parlor, all the ferns that they put on the, on the flowers there, you know how they assembled flowers? [G: Uh huh] You go in the woods and you pick them up. Then you have to count them twenty-five in a bunch and you, then you stack them, you take them to Adams. There used to be a place in Adams you, they got you so much a bunch. I think four cents a bunch.

G: Oh! You made more money doing that?

M: Than I was getting wages in Sprague's.

G: And you did that part time during the strike?

M: Yeah.

G: Do you remember what strike that was when you did that?

M: Two of them.

G: Two, both?

M: Yeah.

G: Both, the last two strikes.

M: Yeah. Yeah, we had to have money, you know.

G: Um, well let's see. How, how were your feelings towards the union leaders in the strikes?

M: Most of them were pretty nice on the average. We didn't have no trouble with any of the them. Like Stackpole, I didn't like him, but I usually got what I wanted out of them. [G: Laughs] Well if you're honest with them I think they'll be honest with you.

G: Uh huh. And what, what kind of things would you want? A specific job, or a [unclear], or (-)

M: Well no. Sometime they set your rate and it was so high you couldn't make nothing. [G: Oh] And in order to maintain, keep a job, you had to maintain around fifteen percent. And if you'd make fifteen percent, and you had to show them proof that you couldn't make it.

G: Hm. And, and then (--)

M: Then he would reset, they would reset the, the job.

G: How would you, how would you show them proof?

M: Systemizer used to come up and reset the job.

G: But how did you show them that you couldn't, couldn't make it, make your 15%? Over many weeks of not making it, or?

M: No, hours, day, you know. In an hour. See you've got to make so many units in an hour. It all depends what type of job you're on. [G: Umhm] You have to assemble so many in that one hour.

G: Umhm, umhm. So you just go and talk to them and you'd say, "well I can't, I can't make anything. I just can't make that many, it's not possible to make it." [M: Yeah, yeah] And they'd, then they'd send somebody down to time you again?

M: Well I always tried to put good work out. [G: Umhm] A lot of them would throw in the rejects. When you're making sometime you get a roll of foil and it would be a patch. They'd have a patch you know, like say uh, right here, this here. Well they would have that stitched [G: Uh huh]. Well that would be a bad unit. They would throw that unit in, which I wouldn't.

G: In with the good?

M: It wasn't good anyhow. It wouldn't be not good anyhow when it got there. I would throw it out instead of putting it in. See, and some throw, threw everything in where others didn't.

G: Huh. So that would be a unit that you would get to do something else to that had the patch in it?

M: No, you had to throw that out, because the patch would cause something. [G: Interfered] It wouldn't be no good. They wouldn't have gone, yeah.

G: Hm, and other people would keep it as good.

M: Yeah. But then it would be tested, it would be thrown out [G: yeah] anyhow. It never went, would go through. [G: Umhm] It never did go through.

G: Umhm. So you didn't let your units like that (--0

M: Oh no, I never did.

G: You didn't get any (--)

M: That's one think I never did. I never did.

G: So everyone that you put out was a good quality?

M: Well I tried to make them, did the best I could.

G: Well that sounds good. And I'm sure they liked that a lot.

M: Yeah. Bill Pierce I worked with, he was my general foreman, Bill Pierce. You know a John Pierce? [G: No] John lives up here off School Street, in the corner of School Street up there, John Pierce. He was a general foreman for a long time.

G: Umhm. He was like uh, at one plant?

M: He was the superintendent.

G: Of a plant, or (--)

M: Yeah, and then his brother Mike Pierce too. Those are, we used to hang around with them, Mike Pierce. [G: Uh huh] Yeah. And then, I was trying to think of the fellow that left and went to, to Chicago.

G: He quit Sprague's [few words unclear]?

M: Yeah, yeah they went for a job in Chicago. Some kind of plant.

G: Umhm. What do you think about the strikes? Were they, were they helpful, or (--)

M: Well yeah, it did straight, make think easier, you know. It did. [G: Umhm] It helped out a lot.

G: Umhm. Especially the first one.

M: Yeah. Oh yeah the first one helped really. That was the best one really, was the first one. You had to do something. [G: Uh huh] Cause I, (--) One day I walked twice back and forth you know. And then I'm paying a babysitter and I ain't getting no money. Although it was twenty-three dollars a week, but I'm only getting \$9.80 a week, you know. [G: Yeah] And then I had to take all the bad work that came because they had the wives, and the mothers, and brothers, and everybody working for them. And then uh, you couldn't start working until they got, gave you the idea, you know. Then they would take the gravy and you had to take what was left. You couldn't make nothing out of it.

G: No bonus like?

M: No bonus.

G: It was the, the [unclear].

M: It was a bonus, but uh, you had to make it. And you got the worst jobs. So some jobs you could do good on it, and some jobs you couldn't make bonus on.

G: Umhm. Do you remember about how many people worked there when you first started and like when you left? Was there a big increase?

M: Well, well [unclear], we got to be around five thousand. [G: Uh huh] But when I started work maybe in that room maybe it was twenty-five. Oh yeah. [G: Umhm] Then at last it got to be hundreds, you know. [G: In the department?] A lot of people. [Comment unclear] And they'd bring in some other kind of production, you know? [G: Umhm]

G: Was there, was there many um, work uh, related uh, parties or social gatherings because of work? Like you showed me your watch. And we know that they had the banquets, but was (--)

M: Oh yeah! We used to have the Quarter Century Club. My husband was foreman. We used to go to that all the time. Oh yeah! Then we had Christmas parties and like that.

G: Uh huh.

M: A lot of them.

G: Uh huh. So there was uh, kind of a little social [M: oh yeah] thing to, to work. How did, how did you generally feel about working there? Did you, did you enjoy most of it?

M: Yeah, I enjoyed working. I'd like to be working now.

G: Would you really?

M: Yeah!

G: How old are you now?

M: Me? [G: yeah] Seventy-eight.

G: Seventy-eight and you still want to work? [M: yeah] You'd go back if you could? Would you do the same kind of things thought?

M: Yeah, everything. I wouldn't mind. I never cared what I did.

G: Uh huh. As long as you had work.

M: Yeah I worked.

G: Umhm. So you generally kind of liked it. How did, how did working um, um, affect like your, your married life? You were both there. Did your husband?

M: Well my husband and I worked together a lot, you know. [G: Did you?] He'd help me, I'd help him. I mean he'd help me with the housework and I'd help (--). And the housework was hard then. [G: Umhm] It's nothing. They think they work today. They take the clothes and throw it in the washing machine. I had to come and soak it and scrub it and boil it and put it in the machine, and wring it through wringers. And you people got it easy. You got it made!

[Both laugh] Yeah, it'd be a lot easier today.

G: So your husband helped you with, with a lot of those things around the house?

M: Yeah. Well yeah.

G: Did he do any cooking, or did you have to do that?

M: Oh yeah, he'd help out with the cooking. I did most of the baking though, but he used to help with the cooking.

G: He really helped you out a lot. Well that's, well you need a little bit of that I guess.

M: Were you ever involved much in the uh, in the community? Like you live in Clarksburg, you've always lived in Clarksburg mostly you said. Were you involved in the Clarksburg community?

G: Oh yeah. My husband was a chairman and I used to help him, Chairman of Clarksburg. In fact I'm, got to get a Chairman going out for the Demo... I'm a Democrat. I know there are Republicans that don't [few words unclear]. [G: Uh huh] But uh, oh yeah!

G: So you're always involved in, in uh, political.

M: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, my husband was uh (--) We went to the convention, different conventions they had in Springfield. In fact when Ted got hurt we were down the convention in Springfield when he got hurt by the airplane that time. [G: Umm] Oh yeah!

G: Did Sprague's encourage people to help out in their communities, or did they (--)

M: No, they never said anything.

G: They never really encourage like (--)

M: No. No, my husband used to be in the, he was in the Guard. He was in the (--) He served six years in the regular army. And then he served about thirty-five years, thirty years, or thirty-five in the National Guard. [G: Umhm] In fact they got a, they got a plaque up there in the cemetery for him, the army, army plaque for him.

G: So he was in the national guard. Now don't they have an arrangement where you have to be out two weeks from work? [M: What?] When they're in the National Guard to go away?

M: Oh yeah. He went to camp. Up to Camp [Drum?

G: And Sprague's didn't mind. And (--)

M: They can't. The army. That's an agreement they have with the army, for the government



after all. [G: Umhm] Oh yeah.

G: So they couldn't just say we don't want you anymore because you're, you're in the National Guard. [M: No, no, oh no.] They had to, they had to go along with it and (--)

M: They still have to go along with it today, because all of the fellows that are in the Guards now, they have to go for training during the summer for two weeks. [G: Umhm] It'd be down at Camp Edwards, or up Fort Edwards. Fort Dix, [G: umhm] or Camp Drum, or someplace.

G: Umhm. Um, in the 1930's when they had the depression, what was it like to live around here? Was it a hard you know, depression a hard time?

M: Well a good thing we had a store manager who would trust us. It was real hard. [G: Uh huh] Yeah. I got (--)

G: What, which store man trusted you? Do you remember?

M: [Donat and Bernards?], poor people who are dead now, they used to trust us. [G: Bernards?] Paid them back every nickel I owed them.

G: What was the name again?

M: Donat and Bernard. They were on Holton Street. It was a grocery store on Holton Street.

G: And they sort of let you run a tab on your groceries and (--)

M: Yeah. I always tried to pay them, but I paid them all off.

G: Umhm. So it was, it was kind of tough then for (--)

M: It was real hard.

G: To make ends, ends meet. And that was uh, well you really weren't working yet, were you? Yourself? Your husband was maybe working, but during when the, the crash 1929?

M: No, I wasn't working then. I didn't start working till uh, '33 before I started.

G: So when you started though, you probably helped, helped a lot to, to [unclear]?

M: Yeah well it took, took us, in order to get one week's work you'd work maybe three days and I'd work for about three days in order to get one's week work. It was part time most of the time.

G: Oh he was part time too?

M: Yeah, at first. Well a lot of people was like that in Sprague, they were working part time. [G: Umhm] It was tough in the beginning.

G: So you didn't have a lot of study production then?

M: No. No they didn't. When the orders came in. You know, they have order. When they come in, then [G: Umhm] yeah, it was rough.

G: And that was before they set the four hour minimum. [M: Yeah] Umhm. Um, well how did you, how did you cope with it then if, if um, if you didn't (--)

M: Oh well he worked on WPA. They used to have WPA you remember?

G: Yes! He was on WPA?

M: Yeah, he worked WPA. Oh he'd take any job he could get. He drove a truck. [G: Umhm] He was ill though. He was laid up. He got scarlet fever and he was laid up. [G: Hm] Oh yeah!

G: Hm. Did you have a family then? Did you have children then?

M: Yup. I had two. I started work when I had the third child, after I had Barbara. She lives next door. [G: Umhm] Yeah, she was (--) That's when I started to work, when she was about fourteen months old. [G: Uh huh] That's when I started to work.

G: Um. Um, how about um, during World War II? Was it uh, let's see. Was it different than, than before the war working at Sprague's?

M: Well Sprague's expanded. A whole lot of departments started then, you know.

G: Umhm, they found a lot of work to do.

M: Oh yeah! For ever part like things for airplanes, things for boats and submarines, and all of these different things, you know,.

G: Umhm. How about at the end of the war though? Did a lot of things, a lot of departments close down?

M: No, no. They expanded. They expanded. It's just the last, last about five years they've gone down isn't it? [G: Umhm] Since they moved out of North Adams they've sunk way down. They've gone way down since they left North Adams. [G: Umhm] That was a bad move they made I think.

G: Umhm. Do you think that's why they, they decreased, just because they moved? [M: Yeah, right] Or is it lack of work? Or?

M: No, they decreased. They lost a lot of their business when they went down to (--)

G: Umhm.

M: My daughter went down there. She made almost what, a thousand dollars a month when she went down there to work?

G: Down where? Oh, oh.

M: Framingham. [G: Umhm] Isn't it Framingham? [G: Yes, yes] No, is it?

G: Or Lexington? Was Lexington the more (--)

M: Down near Boston there.

G: Yeah. Umhm.

M: And my daughter-in-law works, she worked down there six weeks too. [G: Umhm] Yeah. They wanted them to move, but some moved and they got, they really got hurt. They lost their jobs. [G: Hm] They went and sold their home. They got down there and they made a mess on some of the poor people. [G: Hm] No, they lose all the time. They lose all the time, all the time. They not getting ahead. I don't know about all of the other plants they have. [G: Umhm] Because they've got one in England and they got some in Carolina, North, I don't (--) North Carolina, a plant down there. [G: Yeah] Texas. [G: Umhm] Some of our production went to California. [G: Umhm] [Unclear] out in California.

G: Umhm. So if some of your production went to another plant then, you only did parts of a, a job?

M: Well we usually started the production here and then some of the different type of work went to different plants. In fact they had I think thirty at one time. They got one in Italy. [G: Umhm] And I know there's one up in Seattle. They do business up in Seattle I know. [G: Umhm] That, I know that much. They had a lot of plants. They have twenty something. Florida's got one I think. [M: Umhm] I don't know where the other ones are though. They're all over. [G: Hm]

G: Well. Let me just look down the, the list. How, can you compare like say the fifties and the sixties and the seventies in um, in wages and benefits?

M: Well the benefits are a lot better now than they were when I worked. Benefits weren't too good. Now gee, they got everything. They got good hospitalization an all. [G: Uh huh] That hospitalization used to help us a lot boy. [G: Umhm] Because they'd pay everything when you go to the hospital you know. [G: Umhm] And we have hospitalization a lot better now than when we had up there.

G: Do you remember when it came on as a benefit?

M: Must have been after one of the strikes. We got a lot of things, the strikes, you know.

G: Uh huh. Now did you have to pay for that insurance a little?

M: Oh yeah, oh yeah. [G: You had to] Oh yeah, we always paid. [G: paid on it] I forgot what we paid, oh yeah.

G: But you didn't pay the whole thing though. You paid a portion of it.

M: Yeah. [G: Comment unclear] Yeah. We always paid [G: umhm] so much a month.

G: Umhm. Um, let's see. Okay. We went over all of that stuff. How about the Logue, the Sprague Logue?

M: Oh dear. I gave them all to your (--) Mr. Burns has got most of them. [G: Uh huh] I don't know if I got any around now or not.

G: No, that's okay. Did you enjoy it?

M: Oh yeah. We used to love the Logue. Oh yes!

G: Uh huh. What did you like about it?

M: Well did you see my puss in it? [Laughs] My face in it? My husband? Well they just reported everything that went on during the year, you know. [G: Uh huh] Things like that. It was nice.

G: Little tidbits on people and (--)

M: Yeah, it was nice.

G: Did you look forward to each issue? [M: Huh] Did you look forward to each issue of the Logue?

M: Yeah, yeah, we used to all look them over.

G: Did you ever have to report? Were you any uh, ever have to give a little writing, [unclear], or anything?

M: No, I didn't. Maybe my husband did, not me.

G: Uh huh.

M: I was just on production [unclear].

G: Did you ever submit any, the photographs for the kids? I saw one page where they had all the (--)

M: My husband might have. [G: Yeah] Not me. My husband might have. [G: Yeah] Yeah, my husband did.

G: Well what else can you tell me? Is there anything we forgot?

M: Oh I don't know. I can't (--)

G: There must be lots of things you're ready to (--) [Both laugh]

M: I think my mind went blank.

G: Oh no, we've been, we've been talking for quite a while really.

M: Yeah, you can say that again. [G: Laughs] I was trying to think of, if I got a Logue. Yeah, I think I got a Logue out in the kitchen. I'll show you.

G: Okay, okay.

M: '61 I think. [G: Now this is uh] There's my husband and (--)

G: This is a 1961 Quarter Century Club book.

M: We used to go to all of those parties every year. [G: Uh huh] Yeah. [Unclear] King was one of my foreman. DeGrenier, I worked for DeGrenier, he was another foreman. [G: Uh huh] I can get some information right in here [referring to the Logue]. Yeah.

G: And all of these people worked for twenty-five years and you got a watch?

M: Yeah.

G: Umhm. 19, in 1961 you'd already worked there twenty-five years. [M: yeah] In lots of different departments, right?

M: Mary Avery, she was uh, one of the bigshots. [G: Uh huh] Mr. Nolan. [G: Now how did you] Mr. Walker. [G: How did you know] Clark.

G: How did you know those people? Were they supervisors, or?

M: Well, well my, Mary Avery, she worked with, right with Sprague's. She came with Sprague's. And, oh yeah. She, [unclear]. Well she's dead now. That, uh, he was a foreman of the electrics. I think Electric Company, Elect, [unclear].

G: Hm. Do they still have these Quarter Century Clubs now?

M: No. I, I don't think so. I haven't heard anymore about them. [G: Umhm] Yeah, I was trying to see if the other, our other manager that took over R.C. place (--) Let's see. Leo Lamoine, he was a foreman. I worked for him. He's dead now. [G: Uh huh]

G: How did you come to leave Sprague's. Now you said you retired? [M: What?] You just retired?

M: Yeah, at 65 they made me get out. And I was just starting to make money and get ahead, you know, to save.

G: So you weren't too happy then?

M: Yeah. And then I had to quit.

G: How did they make you quit though?

M: You had to quit because the government wouldn't allow you to work after you were sixty-five. This is the government. [G: Oh!] Yeah.

G: And did somebody call you in?

M: I worked for him too, Fitzpatrick.

G: Fitzpatrick. Uh huh. [M: Yeah] Oh.

M: [Puppel?], he worked in the main office [Puppel] did.

G: Uh huh.

M: There goes my son.

G: Did you tell him you were being interviewed?

M: He's the one, he worked for Morrison's. No, he didn't know it.

G: Uh, he probably wonders whose car is in the driveway. Well I think we're, [M: says hi to somebody who has walked into the house] we're just on the way finishing.

M: Hello. I'm getting interviewed. I hope I didn't kill myself. For R.C. Sprague's. She really ought to get a hold of Joan though. And Joan worked with R.C. Sprague's right along.

G: Well Mabel we really appreciate your participation in the end.

M: Well I don't know if I did much good.

G: Oh you certainly did. We appreciate your participation in the oral history project, and we really thank you for help recovering some of the history that's happened at Sprague Electric and really in the community.

M: Yeah.

G: Okay.

END OF TAPE